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A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

SCHOOL CHAPEL

AT

ROSSALL,

4th Sunday after Trinity, 1875,

BY

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HEAD MASTER.

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1875.

GALATIANS, 3, xxiv.—*Wherefore the law was our Schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.*

SOMETIMES, according to the saying, we find the world a very large place; but sometimes we find the world a very small place. Perhaps as we grow older, certainly as the world itself grows older, we find it getting smaller and smaller. As means of communication increase, when the rapidity of locomotion is ever improving, and the quiver of the telegraphic needle has removed mountains and oceans, this side the grave at any rate, absolute separation between friends and acquaintances becomes rarer and rarer. Those to whom we have said good-bye, never thinking to meet again, turn up, so to speak, when least expected. It is difficult now-a-days for two persons who have been once acquainted to lose sight of each other. On this ground it is that I think that "farewell sermons," as they used to be called, are now out of date and inopportune. Especially in a place like this, where from the very nature of the circumstances the congregation is essentially transient and varying. In one sense a farewell sermon would not be inappropriate at least every quarter. At least every quarter is there a sensible change and variety in the persons who worship in this chapel and listen to sermons preached from this pulpit. I remember, when I stood amid the numerous throng of some thirty or forty thousand in the great Exhibition of 1851, thinking to myself that I should never again be a member of that congregation till the day of judgment. And maturer reflection has taught me that one might say the same in almost every con-

gregation of any Parish Church in England every Sunday—and, as it seems to me, not unreasonably here in Rossall. Here especially are we reminded that “time like a flowing stream bears all its sons away”—yet not indeed altogether out of sight, much less out of mind. I do not therefore propose this evening to stir your feelings by the use of such expressions as “for the last time” and “never more.” It may or not be the last time that I shall speak from this pulpit—*οὐδὲν ἔσται ἀπόμωτον*. By divine law, we are forbidden to say “I never will,” and by common prudence we should be warned not to say “I never shall.” Yet, as you know, the last Sunday in the half-year has always been an occasion of extra interest in our little community. I have always reserved to myself the privilege of preaching the last sermon before the holidays; and we all no doubt feel that this last evening in the half-year is at least as special as those that have gone before. I have before me an audience I well know attentive and interested—an audience with whom my words this night will have especial weight. I am very anxious therefore that so marked an occasion, so “great a door and effectual,” should not be frittered away in personal reminiscences and personal explanations. My remarks in this direction shall be brief. What I have been able to teach since I came to Rossall is I feel but a mite in repayment of the debt I owe to those that in former days have taught me. But further, what I have been able to teach is but infinitesimal in proportion to what I have learnt. I know something more about Latin and Greek, and I know a great deal more about human nature and the mysteries of life than when I came here. It has been my privilege to teach, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the privilege. It has been my privilege to administer justice, and I hope and trust that I have done so without fear or favor. But still the privilege or prerogative that has been most dear to me has been that wherein, according to the Poet, “man is likest God”—the high and sublime prerogative of “showing mercy.” But again, when I first, as a clergyman, now seventeen years ago, attempted instructing a village

school after a few months, I felt it my duty to utter a warning or disclaimer that I had been sent to them, not to encourage them to love me, but to love my Master which is in Heaven; and so say I this night. You will therefore, I trust readily understand that I have been casting about for some text of Scripture, or truth otherwise enunciated, that by being connected with the occasion I might hope to imprint on the minds of some at least of my hearers, some fundamental and lasting lesson. I have selected the text—"Wherefore the law was our Schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith." I am a Schoolmaster, and a Schoolmaster may well be glad if he has been able to bring any to Christ. In the present passage, St. Paul, no doubt, is speaking of the Jewish Law given by Moses, and not unfrequently contrasted with the grace that cometh by Jesus Christ. The Apostle's argument is that "the Law," by awakening the conscience to a sense of sin, demonstrated the necessity of a Mediator. For fourteen hundred years had the devout among the Jews been trying to fulfil the Law, and for fourteen hundred years had even the best of the best intentioned failed. The conscience of the Jewish Church was thus educated to receive the welcome message of salvation by faith. But to-night I rather wish to extend the word Law to a wider meaning. Not only the law given on Mount Sinai to the Jews, but the Law imprinted upon the Universe generally—on matter and on mind—all tend, I am convinced, to establishing and confirming religious convictions,—and a sense of this all-pervading Law it is that lifts man into unity with his Creator. Now, as it seems to me, a Schoolmaster's chief work is to instill this sense of Law. Higher education, if it means anything, means a training in the belief in principles. We have to encourage the young mind to trust to the certainty of established rules. It is for this that Grammar has in all ages been an invaluable, some would say the best instrument of education. The great advantage of classical studies is not acquaintance with what the classical authors said, but how they said it. It is just the difference between translating

and construing. Nobody wants a Schoolboy's translation of the ancient masterpieces. Translations we have in abundance. Our object is that a boy may learn to construe—to understand the law and rule of speech and to arrive at a thorough belief that there is a law and rule in speech; that the words of a rational speaker are not jumbled together haphazard, or even formed haphazard, but that principles pervade the whole, and that rules will guide the bearer through the whole. So that when he has thoroughly mastered one page of a Latin author he will, upon turning to the next, know at least what it may be and what it can't be. Thus it is that the mind learns from the known to evolve the unknown. It is a profound observation of Brachet that etymology only attained the dignity of science, that is, was only worth study, when its teachers arrived at the conviction that here as elsewhere Law reigns. The last expression may remind some of us of that Reign of Law which is more especially claimed for the Material Creation. Sometimes, indeed, the universality of Law in Nature has even tended to blind the eye to the Higher Law pervading the whole Universe. I say "sometimes," for there has been a striking illustration lately by the posthumous works of one Professor and the living utterance of another, that occasionally at least Physics have landed the student nearer to Christian belief and to Churchmanship than Metaphysics have done. In other words, the study of matter rather than the study of mind has been effectual as a Schoolmaster bringing to Christ. The discovery of Laws in the Physical world made so striking an effect on the minds of the discoverers, and indeed upon all who heard them, that for a time people generally were startled into a sudden belief that matter was everything, and Physical Law the highest Law in the Universe. The Law of Chemical combinations was so surprising, so wonderful, so grand, that the Chemists boldly claimed that they and they alone had the key to the Mysteries of Life. But even then minds of wider grasp felt and enunciated the true doctrine, "We might have known all along that some such Law prevailed, or the world would have been all

mere chaos and confusion." Latterly the Physicists have supplanted the Chemists and won the throne of Materialist Philosophy. The cry is no longer the Atomic Theory—but, Heat a mode of Motion, and possibly, Life a mode of Heat. Yet all of us, I suppose, all that think, are gradually settling down as it were to a conviction that there is yet a higher Law above and beyond both Chemistry and Physics. Since the day that Moses taught, (at a time, be it remembered, when, in all probability he was, like Athanasius at the Council of Ariminum, in a glorious minority of one,) that "In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth,"—since that time, I say, there has never been a more profound conviction than there is at present among thinkers that there is a Creator, and there is a Law, and Persons not things rule the world. No doubt there is a higher Law that will account for the whole. For every curve there must be an equation, if we could only find it. Some of my hearers may remember a sketch drawn some years ago, meant by way of satire upon the over-dressing then prevalent at the Universities, in which two undergraduates were represented as illustrating, "a neat thing in trousers which only required two to show the pattern." The pattern of the Universe not two millions of individuals can display. At present we see only a corner—an infinitesimal corner or outer edge. When instead of the three or four thousand years of recorded history we shall have a one hundred thousand, when our telescopes instead of dimly observing one or two planets of our own Solar family shall penetrate the mysteries of a thousand stellar systems, when the microscope or electrical dialysis shall tell us what is the essential difference between one element and another, then shall we begin to know something of the pattern of God's Universe. Give me a million years of history and I shall be able to approximate to the equation to this curve of life. Meantime, arguing from the known to the unknown, we know that throughout the whole Law prevails. I do not refer to those ingenious machines that have been invented to shew that a series of movements may recur for a million times,

and then, all by the same machinery, a diverse phenomenon present itself, and once more the ordinary movements recur. This seems to me a quite inadequate way of representing the grand Law that must reconcile miracles with experience. Yet that some such law there is, I for one fully believe. When we arrive at it, whether in the present state of limited faculties or whether in a world where our eyes shall be as telescopes and our knowledge increased as much as if reason were given to a dog, our first feeling no doubt will be "we might have been sure of it all along." Be we then sure, my brethren, that there is a Law, a grand fundamental principle that will gather up all the laws that we have yet discovered or have had revealed to us—*Mens agitat molem*. There is a Mind somewhere that turns the crank of Creation, and there is a rule and law in the revolutions. Let us strive after that fixity of principle that inspired the Psalmist when he says—"Verily there is a God that judgeth the earth," and with Job in his unswerving reliance on God—"I know that my Redeemer liveth." Let us learn to "embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope that is given us of everlasting life in Jesus Christ our Saviour." Once more I repeat that a belief in Law is a Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ: not only as the Jewish Law frightened the Jews to a harbour of refuge, but as believing that as there is a Law for matter so there is also a Law for mind, and a higher Law embracing and harmonizing both. That the world is not a Phantasmagoria of unsubstantial delusions, or a scramble for material existence—but something far greater, infinitely greater and nobler—a Life worth living—a Life destined to a consummation as yet only dimly conceived, and utterly inadequately expressed when spoken of as a Life in the Heavens. As certainly as the Laws or Rules of Grammar bring a student through the unknown land of a new page, so surely, or with infinitely greater sureness will faith and reliance on the eternal truths of the Gospel carry us through all the changes and chances of this mortal life to that high hope above where "we shall know even as we are known."



